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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the alternative-justification approach to debate, seeks to explore some of the objections to this approach, and considers several of the basic assumptions made by its supporters. The alternative-justification theory of debate is based on the assumption that any given question under debate has a number of affirmative plans and separate justifications. By contrast, a basic historical tenet of intercollegiate debate is that since any issue has two sides, the most effective decision making occurs after both positions are stated, argued, and evaluated. Following a statement and a discussion of each of the six assumptions on which the alternative-justification approach is based, it is concluded that academic debate theory should change but that analytical weaknesses in the alternative-justification case do not justify its addition to debate theory. (RB)

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A CRITIQUE OF THE ALTERNATIVE-JUSTIFICATION AFFIRMATIVE CASE

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A Critique of the Alternative--

Justification Affirmative Case

Intercollegiate debate has undergone a series of changes in the many years since Illinois College and Knox College clashed on May 5, 1881. Changes will certainly continue and new ideas of argumentation theory ought to be encouraged. However, each suggested alternation needs to be fully evaluated before it is accepted by the forensic community.

The focus of this paper is the alternative--justification approach to affirmative cases. This concept permits the affirmative team to present a number of different plans in the same speech, each proposal armed with its own separate justification. A basic tenet of debate theory that has remained constant throughout the history of this activity maintains that since any issue has two sides the most effective decision making occurs after both positions are stated, developed, argued, compared, and evaluated. Therefore, this paper seeks to explore some of the objections to the alternative--justification approach. Since the case format is a relatively new suggestion[1] the objections offered herein are of necessity opinionated instead of empirical in origin.

Advocates of the alternative--justification case have made several assumptions concerning the validity of this approach. While every assumption should be fully investigated this paper is limited to a consideration of a few of the most basic assumptions made by the case's supporters. The comments presented here are merely an initial step in what ought to be a complete and detailed analysis.

ASSUMPTION 1: "The alternative--justification affirmative extends the logic of the parallel advantages case."[2]

Although Lichtman, Garvin, and Corsi advertise their concept as an extension of current debate thinking the alternative--justification is a fundamentally different case approach. The parallel advantages case offers one proposal with a number of alleged independent advantages or justifications. In this instance the affirmative team isolates its interpretation of the resolution to one policy alternative. An alternative--justification case, as previously stated, presents a number of different affirmative plans and separate justifications in the same speech. These two case theories obviously differ in design.

The logical relationship between these concepts is unclear. The authors assume that because our current theory allows multiple justifications of one plan we should also accept multiple plans with separate justifications as a similar concept. At no point do the advocates of this approach defend a reason for granting such an opportunity to the affirmative team.

Traditions of debate specify that the affirmative shall present one plan. Lee Hultzen analyzed the classical concepts of stasis and concluded that the issue of remedium concerned the advancement of "the proposal."[3] His discussion of the concept implies that one specific plan will be the subject of the advocate's analyses. Contemporary writers seem to agree with the notion of a singular affirmative plan. Freeley mentions stock issues with a reference to "the plan," [4] as do Hunsaker and Smith[5] and Thompson[6]. Recent additions to argumentation theory continue to advance the concept of a single proposal. In fact, as Brock, Chesebro, Cragan, and Klumpp have indicated, "a systematic analysis focuses upon the number of ways in which interactions in a system might be described. The affirmative team ultimately selects only one of the descriptions, but it has been exposed to alternative descriptions in their

research and analysis."[7] At the very least the defenders of the alternative--justification case owe us an explanation of the reasons behind a move destined to change our presumption about the number of specific proposals the affirmative team may advocate. Certainly the affirmative is not suffering a competitive disadvantage because of the current one-plan concept.

ASSUMPTION 2: "The use of the alternative--justification approach does not, of course, alter the affirmative's burden of proof."[8]

An alternative--justification case does indeed alter the burden of proof for the affirmative. This occurs because the case structure logically demands an increase in the number of statements required to demonstrate a prima facie case. Lichtman, Garvin, and Corsi indicate that their approach still requires the affirmative to prove the significance and inherency of its arguments. One should also add the concept of uniqueness, explained by Hunsaker and Smith as a demonstration that the benefits are unique to one policy system and not the result of other possible changes.[10] Therefore, the first affirmative speaker must prove that each advantage is significant, inherent, and unique. Inherency would involve a demonstration that the advantages can not result from the present system while the uniqueness issue would involve some proof by the affirmative that the advantages of plan 1 would not result from plan 2 and vice-versa. Without such an explanation an affirmative case of multiple plans would fail to meet the prima facie burden of uniqueness. Thus, the alternative--justification concept obligates the affirmative to demonstrate uniqueness between plans and as a result the affirmative's burden of proof is increased.

One might assume for a moment, as the authors do, that an affirmative team could present two plans each of which has two independent advantages. Here the affirmative burdens are again increased. Not only must the affir-

mative establish the significance, inherency, and uniqueness of each advantage but furthermore, the advantages must be shown to be truely independent within each plan. Otherwise the claim of "parallel advantages for separate but equal plans" could be dismissed as mere assertion without verification.

Supporters of the alternative--justification case also argue that one could "discuss one policy area but propose several distinct plans, each of which, it argues, yields the same set of advantages."[11] Here the concept of uniqueness is totally dismissed since the advocates appear to be claiming that the affirmative has no obligation to justify its advantages as benefits which result solely from the policy option under discussion. In this instance the alternative--justification case alters the burden of proof by obviating a stock issue.

ASSUMPTION 3: "Academic debate has placed the judge in a position analogous to that of a policy maker: debaters are asking him to consider the desirability of taking courses of action suggested by the resolution."[12]

If one tends to accept this particular assumption the analogy must be carried to its logical conclusion if it is to have complete validity. Most legislative bodies generally deliberate upon policy recommendations one at a time. Support for this position is available in Robert's Rules of Order which specifies that "if a series of independent resolutions relating to different subjects is included in one motion, it must be divided upon request of a single member, which request may be made while another has the floor."[13] Legislative rules provide a safeguard against simultaneous deliberation of different policies. If we accept the role of a judge as analogous to a legislative policy maker then we must also assume that the rules governing legislative debate ought to apply to academic debate as well. Thus the

judge or the negative team ought to have the opportunity to respond to an alternative--justification case by demanding a "division of the question." No such provision exists in our current repertoire of debate rules. Any suggestion for adding a "division of the question" to our debate guidelines might be rightfully viewed as ludicrous.

In addition, the defenders of the alternative--justification case maintain that "this innovation would take academic debate closer to real world decision making, where alternative approaches are inevitably considered when a policy change is under review."[14] The policy process does weigh alternatives but the advocates of this case fail to prove that decision making bodies ever conduct their deliberations by engaging in simultaneous debate over two different, albeit somewhat related, policy systems. It seems unusual for them to claim that this case approach reflects reality when they can provide no examples of decision-making bodies that actually argue over separate policies concurrently.

ASSUMPTION 4: "There is no logical reason why a decision for or against the debate proposition cannot pivot upon the ad seriatum consideration of several topical plans; if any of these trials favor the affirmative, adoption of the resolution has been warranted."[15]

In the discussion of the previous assumption the analogy of the judge-policy maker was accepted. A logical pitfall exists in this notion. None of the participants in an academic debate have the power either to institute policy or to recommend with authority any policy to government agencies. The course of action judged "the best" in an academic debate is of meaningless value in the real world. If the debate judge can do nothing constructive with the policy that triumphs in this mode of decision-making then it is useless to view the judge as similar to a policy maker. The role of a debate judge

is to evaluate the logical and argumentative skills displayed by two opposing teams of speakers as they clash over policy proposals. Policy makers are interested in the product of argumentative discourse while debate judges ought to be concerned with the processes used in such discourse.

Alternative--justification cases appear invalid if we agree that the debate critic is evaluating the best debaters. For example we might one day see this scene. The team of George McGovern and Hubert Humphrey, sample cases in hand, stride into the Senate and present three different medical care programs. Their opponents, Hugh Scott and James Buckley, are "blocked out" against plans 1 and 2 but have little to say against plan 3. Aside from any assumptions about the position of this round in the power-match one very general conclusion is evident. Most lay observers probably would not cast a ballot calling the Democrats "better" debaters since they triumphed in only one of three separate clashes. Yet in an academic debate, according to the alternative--justification theorists, McGovern and Humphrey ought to "get the ballot." Allowing the affirmative team to win a debate by losing two of three cases is certainly contrary to our competitive traditions. After all, if John Newcombe beats Stan Smith in two of three sets of tennis, Smith is not declared the winner.

A majority of debate critics might agree that it is more difficult to defeat two cases than to win one. This is the logical reason why a decision for or against a resolution cannot pivot upon the ad seriatum consideration of several plans. In selecting the best policy the debate judge might be forced to vote against the best debaters. That hardly seems fair in view of the fact that we can do nothing useful with the policy emerging from a debate.

ASSUMPTION 5: "When the affirmative indicates that it operationally defines

the resolution in the context of the affirmative plan, this does not mean that the plan defines the resolution. Rather it means that the plan represents one of the many proposals that are logically consistent with a reasonable interpretation of the resolution."[16]

This particular assumption violates the traditional view concerning the purpose of a definition of terms. Donald Ecroyd maintains that "the issues are not discerned by the foggy use of words. In a debate time is too short for such quibbles. By defining your terms you can see more clearly what the issues are."[17] Roy Wood adds that "the affirmative's definition and analysis of the topic determines the direction of the debate."[18] Finally, C. William Colburn points out that "the affirmative's team's responsibility of setting the ground for debate is started with the definition of terms. In this process the affirmative team is letting the opposing team, the judge, and the listeners know that the proposition is being interpreted in a prescribed manner."[19] All of these quotations point to one central theme: the defining of terms serves to set the limits of what will be debated in a given contest.

The users of the alternative--justification case imply that the affirmative team has the power to change the limits of debate at any time during a specific round. In the first speech the affirmative's multiple plan approach implies that "this resolution means any one of these three plans or any combination thereof." By the final rebuttal the meaning of the resolution may be reduced to "only this plan." By allowing the affirmative to exercise the right to drop plans we tacitly agree that a team ought to have the right to change its interpretation of the resolution during the debate. Interestingly enough the authors of this case idea offer no reason why the affirmative should have such a privilege. If we let the practitioners of alternative

--justification redefine terms during a debate then it seems logical to extend such a right to all affirmative teams. Perhaps academic debate ought to forget about definitions altogether. Accepting the theory behind an alternative--justification case sets a dangerous precedent which might ruin the whole activity.

Furthermore, it is doubtful ~~if~~ operational definitions of a proposal can be independent of one another. Ehninger states that "operational definitions seek to clarify the meaning of a term by citing the results that will follow from carrying out a given operation or a series of operations."[20] Since each affirmative proposal adds a new set of operations the meaning of the resolution ("the term" in this case) must expand to include each new operation. Hence, using Ehninger's position, it appears that the effect of operational definitions is cumulative. Berlo adds that in an operational definition "all we can do is to reduce our meaning to that applying in a given situation and try to express that meaning."[21] A debate is a given situation. Therefore, any series of plans operationally defines the resolution as the totality of all those plans in the context of that one round.

ASSUMPTION 6: ". . . the strategic advantages of the alternative--justification affirmative are among its most attractive features. We will argue, however, that these advantages are not so overshelming as to provide a rational for banning the alternative--justification approach."[22]

This case format unquestionably provides the affirmative team with the option to change the focus of the debate at will without suffering any evil effects. Once the affirmative recognizes that a particular plan has been punctured beyond repair it may simply eliminate that plan from the debate.

In such a circumstance the negative has no counterveiling strategy. The affirmative advantage of "home turf" is magnified by the license to drop cases in the rebuttals. A negative team is faced with the prospect that its only strategy is some reference like "we sure killed them on that one." Such appeals may not win very many rounds.

It seems reasonable that the negative team should be granted a viable strategy of its own for attacking alternative--justification cases. The advocates of this new concept offer no such strategy. In fact they provide no reason why only the affirmative team should receive a new strategic edge. Certainly the alternative--justification case offers an unbalanced addition to debate theory.

The new strategy might even work to the detriment of the affirmative team. Lichtman, Garvin, and Corsi assume that the judge's behavior is totally predictable in matters of debate decisions. Their claim that "if any of these trials favor the affirmative, then adoption of the resolution is warranted" assumes that the judge will always believe that the one case carried by the affirmative is more important than the defeated cases. A critic could reason that the remaining plan and case are picayune in comparison to the cases defeated by the negative. Thus the judge may vote against the affirmative in spite of the fact that one case emerged victorious. Furthermore, the situation becomes almost incredible if we consider the instance in which an affirmative advances an even number of plans and the debate ends with each team "winning" half of the total number of cases. What magical formula will save the debate for the affirmative? Alternative--justification cases are not strategically foolproof.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper raises some questions about the validity of alternative--justification cases. While these comments in no way constitute a comprehensive attack against this case format they do suggest some possible analytical weaknesses in the idea. Academic debate theory should change but all alterations ought to be firmly based upon defendable reasons for such change. At this point in time the alternative--justification case has not been defended as a necessary addition to debate theory.

FOOTNOTES

1. Allan Lichtman, Charles Garvin, and Jerry Corsi, "The Alternative - Justification Affirmative: A New Case Form," Journal of the American Forensic Association, (Fall, 1973), 59-69.
2. Lichtman, Garvin, and Corsi, 60.
3. Lee Hultzen, "Stasis in Deliverative Analysis," in Donald Bryan (Ed.) The Rhetorical Idiom (Ithaca: Cornell Press, 1958) 109-110.
4. Austin J. Freeley, Argumentation and Debate, 3rd Ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1971), 53.
5. David Hunsaker and Craig Smith, The Bases of Argument: Ideas in Conflict (New York: Bobbs - Merrill Company, 1972), 42.
6. Wayne Thompson, Modern Argumentation and Debate: Principles and Practices (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 53.
7. Bernard Brock, Jim Chesebro, John Cragan, and Jim Klumpp, Public Policy Decision-Making: Systems Analysis and Comparative Advantage Debate (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 89.
8. Lichtman, Garvin and Corsi, 62.
9. Lichtman, Garvin and Corsi, 62.
10. Hunsaker and Smith, 42.
11. Lichtman, Garvin and Corsi, 68.
12. Lichtman, Garvin and Corsi, 62.
13. General Henry M. Robert, Robert's Rules of Order Revised (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1951), 91.
14. Lichtman, Garvin and Corsi, 68.
15. Lichtman, Garvin and Corsi, 63.
16. Lichtman, Garvin and Corsi. 63.
17. Donald Ecroyd, "The Debate Proposition", in David Potter (Ed.) Argumentation and Debate (New York: The Dryden Press, 1954), 32.

FOOTNOTES
(continued)

18. Roy Wood, Strategic Debate (Skokie: National Textbook, 1968), 76.

19. C. William Colburn. Strategies for Educational Debate (Boston: Holbrook Press, 1972), 129.

20. Douglas Ehninger, Influence Belief, and Argument (Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1974), 42.

21. David Berlo, The Process of Communication (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Wilson, 1960), 292.

22. Lichtman, Garvin and Corsi, 66.